

Podocarpus elatus – Plum Pine

Podocarpus elatus, commonly known as Plum Pine or Illawarra Plum is a native conifer found naturally in dense subtropical, riverine and seashore rainforests from Cape York to just south of Sydney. It is a tall evergreen tree growing to some 40m. This is a fast growing tree with male and female forms, it takes 8 to 10 years to reach maturity. As this species is dioecious both male and female trees are required to produce fruit.

Although a conifer, this tree does not have a 'pine cone' but instead carries a single seed attached to the branch by a fleshy fleshy purple-black berry. The fleshy stem that was used by the Aborigines as a food. The pulpy fruits have a grape-like texture and sweetish, mild pine flavour that is enhanced by cooking. Fruit only appears on the female plant. It ripens between March and July, and may be eaten raw or made into a jam or jelly. It is often used as a compliment for chilli, garlic, sauces and marinades, and are especially popular in sauces, preserves, muffins, cheesecakes and fruit compotes

Plum pine is also a useful timber tree. The wood has a very fine, even texture and a straight grain with inconspicuous growth rings. It has been used for table tops, furniture, packing cases, kitchen utensils, musical instruments (piano keys and violin bellies) and wood turning.

Plum Pine will grow readily in both full sun and part shade. It can be grown as a feature tree, grows well in pots or tubs and makes an interesting hedge. It will tolerate light frost. It prefers a rich, moist, acidic soil, but will tolerate a range of soil types, and must have adequate drainage. This tree is resistant to salt spray, making it suitable for coastal conditions.

Propagation

Sow – at any time in a good quality well-draining seed raising mix. Simply press the seed into the surface of the growing medium until it is just covered. Keep the growing medium lightly moist until germination and then increase watering slightly and as needed.

Prick the seedlings out into individual forestry tubes once they are large enough to handle. Grow on as desired. Pot on when roots emerge from the tubes to avoid j-rooting.

Plant out in Spring or early Summer after the danger of frost has passed.